



BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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**BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY LAUNCHES WEBSITE
MAKING IMPORTANT HISTORICAL RECORDS OF THE PACKER COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE
AVAILABLE AND EASILY SEARCHABLE ON-LINE**

Primary sources illuminate how Packer Collegiate Institute – opened in 1845 – responded to changes in society and major events in American history.

November 13, 2017 Brooklyn, NY— Brooklyn Historical Society (BHS) is pleased to announce the launch of a new website, *The Packer Collegiate Institute: A Story of Education in Brooklyn*, made possible by generous funding from the Leon Levy Foundation. The launch of the site marks the culmination of three years of work by the staff of BHS's Othmer Library, who digitized, preserved, and catalogued, 283.6 cubic feet of archival materials that tell the remarkable history of The Packer Collegiate Institute. The first historians to benefit from the wealth of primary source material in the collection have been Brooklyn's ambitious high school students, including over nearly two dozen enrolled at Packer. Now, with the launch of the website (which is built on WordPress, and crawled by Google), these resources will be discoverable to casual researchers and advanced scholars alike.

"When Packer gave us the honor of stewarding its collection, we eagerly dove into material dating from 1845 to the 2000s," said Deborah Schwartz, President, Brooklyn Historical Society. "We are enormously grateful to the Leon Levy Foundation for recognizing the value of processing this collection, which has already enabled current young scholars to draw meaningful connections with those who came before them. With the launch of the new website, we are thrilled to make these illuminating documents available to viewers across the web."

"The story of Packer is more than that of a school," said Dr. Bruce L. Dennis, Packer's Head of School. "It is one of social and economic transformation in Brooklyn and the United States. It is the story of the development of urban growth and institution-building, of the evolving status of American women and a progressive commitment to women's education reaching back to before the Civil War, and of the changing beliefs about education and its role in American society."

"As a graduate of Packer and a Brooklynite, I am thrilled with the Leon Levy Foundation's role in perpetuating the legacy of an institution that played a formative role in my life," said Shelby White, Founding Trustee of the Leon Levy Foundation. "I can't wait to explore the site."

The site draws on highlights from the collection, which includes yearbooks from 1913 to 2015, prints and photographs that document life at Packer from the 1880s through the 2000s, a daguerreotype portrait of the graduating Class of 1853, letters from Brooklyn Female Academy cofounder David G. Cartwright, copies of the *School-Room Echos* (a student publication dating from 1852 to 1853), and students' accounts of September 11, 2001. Objects include class rings, pins, and other ephemera, as well as original drawings of Packer buildings.

The website covers the history of Packer from its founding in 1845 as the Brooklyn Female Academy to its present incarnation as a coeducational pre-K-12 school. The site highlights major events—from the fire that nearly destroyed its legacy to the transformation into a co-educational curriculum—to more nuanced details—the effect war had on enrollment and the architecture of the campus. A virtual photo gallery can be browsed comprehensively, filtered categorically, or accessed by selecting images from the essay pages.

Packer faculty member, Dr. Sarah Strauss, has brought juniors and seniors from her *Making History* class to BHS over the past several years to learn how to conduct research in the archive. Students draw connections between their own lives and the lives of Packer students that came before them, helping them develop critical thinking skills and understand larger themes in American history. Each year, their findings are presented in an annual symposium held at BHS. Their work is now also published on the new website.

Additionally, BHS's Teen Council, a group of 15 - 20 students from various local high schools, were able to delve into the Packer Archives as part of their exhibition project this year. Inspired by the Women's Marches, the 2017 Teen Council created an exhibition about Brooklyn women, past and present who have been active catalysts for education and empowerment. With the Packer Archives now processed and digitized, the Teen Council selected two Packer alumnae to feature directly in their exhibition. The Teen Council's exhibition, *Wise Eyes: Still Woke* will be on view at BHS through February 1, 2018.

The Packer Collegiate Institute: A Story of Education in Brooklyn
<http://brooklynhistory.org/packer/>

About Brooklyn Historical Society

Founded in 1863, Brooklyn Historical Society is a nationally recognized urban history center dedicated to preserving and encouraging the study of Brooklyn's extraordinary 400-year history. Located in Brooklyn Heights and housed in a magnificent landmark building designed by George Post and opened in 1881, today's BHS is a cultural hub for civic dialogue, thoughtful engagement and community outreach. In May 2017 BHS opened a second site in DUMBO's Brooklyn Bridge Park.

About The Packer Collegiate Institute

Founded in 1845, The Packer Collegiate Institute is the oldest independent school in Brooklyn. A co-educational school enrolling over 1000 students from Preschool through Grade 12, Packer is located at 170 Joralemon Street on a landmarked campus of contiguous buildings including the former St. Ann's Church, which the school acquired in 1967. In 2014, the school acquired 100 Clinton Street, where the Packer Early Learning Center will open in Fall 2018.

About Leon Levy Foundation

The Leon Levy Foundation supports the preservation, understanding and expansion of knowledge in the Ancient World, Art and Humanities, Nature and Gardens, Neuroscience, Human Rights and Jewish culture.

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